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ABSTRACT

Student teachers enrolled in an extended practicum or internship experience participated in a study of the occurrence of "critical incidents" during the teaching experience. The students attended a workshop in which the concept of "critical incidence" was defined, and were provided opportunities for practice before undergoing the teaching experience. During the year-long experience, the 17 elememtary school interns reported 224 critical incidents and the 10 secondary school interns reported 179 critical incidents in the supervision of student teaching. In general, the students did not report incidents in their supervision having to do with aims and objectives, curriculum, or professional content at a frequency level that might be expected in the internship phase. Clearly, the student teachers perceived the supervision experience as centered on classroom management, basic elements of teaching-learning strategies and interpersonal relationships with the supervisors. Generally, interns failed to recognize a strong training role for their supervisors who were seen as resource persons, evaluators, liaison persons, and sources of support. (CB)

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Critical Incidents in the Supervision of Student Teaching in an Extended Practicum

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Critical Incidents in the Supervision of Student Teaching in an Extended Practicum

This research was undertaken to study critical incidents in the supervision of the student teaching of student teachers engaged in an extended practicum or internship experience. An earlier phase of the project (Housego & Boldt, 1985) found such incidents reported by student teachers, co-operating teachers and faculty supervisors engaged in a series of shorter school experiences, a distributed practicum, to be very unevenly spread over an amended set of categories based on Broudy's (1965) problems of practice in the education profession--aims and objectives, organization-management, curriculum, teaching-learning and professional content plus a sixth category encompassing incidents having to do with the interpersonal relationships between the student teacher and his or her supervisors, a category added by the authors.

According to Broudy (1965), the problems of practice he describes establish education as a unique profession. That being the case, one would expect these problems to be at the heart of the professional education of teachers and constitute the major substantive content of their student teaching experience. Various reasons for the abundance of incidents in some categories and the absence or near absence of incidents in others--the non-realization

of these expectations in the distributed practicum were explored (Housego & Boldt, 1985, pp. 120-121). The greater than expected number of incidents in the management and organization and interpersonal categories was particularly noteworthy. Both, it seemed, might be linked to the marginal nature of the student teacher's position (Clifton, 1979, p. 63) and to the often pressured and stressful relationship of the student teacher with his or her supervisors as an effort is made to please both sponsor teacher and university supervisor and in addition demonstrate a high degree of competence in teaching in a relatively short time.

The time limitations experienced in the distributed practicum are much reduced if not eliminated in an extended period of practice. With additional practice time, a student teacher could perhaps become much more adept at handling management and organizational problems in the classroom. In addition interpersonal relationships with supervisors, particularly the sponsor teacher, would maybe feature fewer misunderstandings, roles having become more clearly defined and accepted. Even the pressures of evaluation could be somewhat lessened in an extended practicum in that there would be more evidence on which to base evaluative decisions and more time for the student teacher to demonstrate competence.

It was therefore decided to study the distribution of critical incidents in the supervision of student teaching over the amended

Broudy categories during a longer period of practice in schools, a time span of months rather than weeks.

Theoretical Perspectives:

Student teaching is considered to be an important part of teacher education, an occasion when theory and practice are melded, and ideally, student teachers learn to criticize their own classroom performances in the light of the best craft-rules available as well as learning based on research. Although research on supervision, particularly studies based on data provided by the participants in the supervisory process, was once limited (Zeichner, 1980, p. 46), this is no longer the case; in fact, one might say there is a continuing research effort directed toward understanding the supervisory process and its effects in the larger context of the socialization of student teachers (Zeichner & Grant, 1981; Lortie, 1975).

Apart from studies of the effects of school experience on student teacher attitudes, and control ideologies (Zeichner & Grant, 1981; Tabachnick & Zeichner, 1984), a number of researchers (Gibson, 1976, Fuller and Bown, 1975, Tardif, 1985) have documented, in those learning to teach, a developmental sequence beginning with survival concerns and progressing to teaching situation concerns and finally to concerns for pupil needs. It is thought that student teachers, particularly in a brief school experience, may be unlikely to progress beyond the first stage,

survival concerns, unless perhaps they are stimulated to become more reflective and given more opportunity to master the survival and technical-type problems of the first two stages. How can supervision assist the student in scaling this developmental ladder?

Some attempt to address this question through identifying various models of supervision, some of which are based on the analysis of the dialogue of the post-conference (Blumberg, 1977; Hunt, 1977-1978; Sprinthall & Thies-Sprinthall, 1983; Grimmett, 1981; Zeichner & Liston, 1985), and some of which are based in a conceptual analysis of the various approaches to supervision (Glickman, 1981; Horwood, 1981; Olson, 1982; Housego & Grimmett, 1983) have been made.

It is difficult to know which supervisory approaches are most effective and under which circumstances, and although supervisees' preferences for particular styles of supervision (Blumberg, 1977; Copeland, 1982; Nias, 1977) provide some guidance, more information as to which specific supervisory behaviors are helpful and which are not is required. The critical incidents technique has been used to study supervisory behaviors in several contexts--faculty supervision of high school household economics student teachers (Dirks, 1967), the supervision of student nurses in nursing practicum (Drachlet, 1981), and more recently the critical behavioral requirements of co-operating teachers (Copas, 1984).

Methods and Data Sources

The critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954) is designed to collect an extensive range of incidents from those who are in a position to report what facilitated or hindered the aim of an activity. In this study the activity of ultimate concern was the teaching performance of student teachers, and since student teachers themselves are perhaps in the best position to make judgements as to the effects of various events on their teaching performances, their reports of critical incidents in the supervision of student teaching were sought. The instrument used for collecting these incidents (see Appendix A) does not unduly restrict the kind of incident which might be reported; accordingly, it was expected that student teachers would be able to document incidents representing the full range of Broudy's categories if, in fact, these incidents occurred in a notable way in their supervision.

Broudy's categories were used instead of more idiosyncratic categories constructed from the incidents themselves (although the latter is the common practice in the Flanagan critical incidents method) because the former categories lie in the public domain. As such, the Broudy categories constitute a rationalized reconstruction of professional activity in education. Put in another way, the categories represent the intended activities of the education profession. Consequently, classifying the incidents

according to these categories is a check on the congruency of intents and reality, something of a crosscheck on the comprehensiveness of the student teaching experience as mirrored in critical incidents selected from it.

Student teachers enrolled in an extended practicum, an internship experience, were asked to take part in this study. After a workshop session in which the purpose and procedures of the research and the concept of a critical incident in student teaching supervision were explained and, practice in recording a few dramatized incidents was provided, subjects agreed to become involved. Seventeen student teachers in a newly established elementary internship program and ten student teachers in a secondary internship, in its fifth year of operation, became regular participants in the project, contributing on a weekly basis, reports of critical incidents in the supervision of their student teaching.

The elementary interns with a median age of 21 and ages ranging from 20 to 33 were slightly younger than the secondary ones, whose median age was 23 and whose ages ranged from 21 to 45. The elementary interns had more uniform previous educational experiences--generally two previous practica--whereas those in the secondary pattern had had from 0 to 3 previous blocks of school experience. All of the elementary interns and all but one of the secondary interns were in the fourth year of a four year education

degree program. The one secondary intern participating in the project who was a transfer to the Faculty of Education after a degree was, therefore, the only participant with no school experience.

The two particular internship programs are alike in terms of their location, the monthly stipend provided student teachers and the interview process by means of which participants are selected by school principals. In both programs student teachers are supervised by faculty members who are also their course instructors.

The elementary and secondary internship programs differ somewhat. Whereas secondary interns are located in schools from September to April teaching half-day and taking courses the other half, elementary interns teach over the period of the whole day with the exception of Fridays, when they pursue coursework on campus. In addition, they return to campus for coursework for a month before Christmas. Secondary interns work continuously with the same classes generally in two subject areas, whereas, elementary interns work before Christmas with one sponsor teacher and class and after Christmas with a second sponsor teacher and class, generally at a different grade level.

In order that some probable antecedents of the reported incidents might be explored, each subject was asked to complete an information sheet (see Appendix B).

The elementary and the secondary critical incidents in the supervision of student teaching were edited and classified according to the amended Broudy categories which were validated in the previously mentioned earlier study (Housego & Boldt, 1985). The total number of incidents, both elementary and secondary, in each category was also determined and the percentages of incidents in each of the six categories compared with those found in the distributed practicum setting of the first study. Differences were tested for significance.

Results and Conclusions

During their internship year the seventeen elementary students reported 224 and the ten secondary student teachers 179 critical incidents in the supervision of student teaching. Tables 1, 2 and 3 present, respectively, the distribution over the six categories of the elementary incidents, the secondary incidents and the total number of critical incidents collected in the extended practicum. Table 4 (Housego & Boldt, 1985, p. 118) presents the distribution of incidents over the same categories in a distributed practicum.

[Insert Tables 1, 2, 3 and 4 about here]

The Tables clearly indicate that the elementary and secondary school interns as well as the total group, like the students of the previous study (Housego & Boldt, 1985) did not report incidents in

TABLE 1

CATEGORIZATION OF CRITICAL INCIDENTS (ELEMENTARY)

Category		Type of Incident					
		Positive		Negative		Total	
		%	f	%	f	%	f
I.	Aims and Objectives	1.2	2	0.0	0	0.9	2
II.	Organization-Management	44.1	75	15.1	9	37.5	84
III.	Curriculum	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0
IV.	Teaching-Learning	20.0	34	1.9	1	15.6	35
V.	Professional Content	1.2	2	0.0	0	0.9	2
VI.	Student teacher-Supervisor Interpersonal Relationships	33.5	57	83.0	44	45.1	101
	Total	100.0	170	100.0	54	100.0	224

TABLE 2

CATEGORIZATION OF CRITICAL INCIDENTS (SECONDARY)

Category		Type of Incident					
		Positive		Negative		Total	
		%	f	%	f	%	f
I.	Aims and Objectives	0.7	1	4.7	2	1.7	3
II.	Organization-Management	47.5	65	18.6	8	40.6	73
III.	Curriculum	1.5	2	0.0	0	1.1	2
IV.	Teaching-Learning	24.1	33	11.6	5	21.1	38
V.	Professional Content	3.6	4	2.3	1	3.3	5
VI.	Student teacher-Supervisor Interpersonal Relationships	22.6	31	62.8	27	32.2	58
	Total	100.0	136	100.0	43	100.0	179

TABLE 3

CATEGORIZATION OF CRITICAL INCIDENTS

(COMBINED ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY)

Category		Type of Incident					
		Positive		Negative		Total	
		%	f	%	f	%	f
I.	Aims and Objectives	1.0	3	2.1	2	1.2	5
II.	Organization-Management	45.7	140	17.5	17	39.0	157
III.	Curriculum	.6	2	0.0	0	.5	2
IV.	Teaching-Learning	21.9	67	6.2	6	18.1	73
V.	Professional Content	2.0	6	1.0	1	1.7	7
VI.	Student teacher-Supervisor Interpersonal Relationships	28.8	88	73.2	71	39.5	159
	Total	100.0	306	100.0	97	100.0	403

TABLE 4

CATEGORIZATION OF CRITICAL INCIDENTS

IN DISTRIBUTED PRACTICUM STUDY

Category / Subcategory	Type of Incident					
	Positive		Negative		Total	
	%	f	%	f	%	f
I. Aims and Objectives	2.0	2	0.0	0	1.60	2
II. Organization-Management	57.4	58	12.5	3	48.8	61
III. Curriculum	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0
IV. Teaching-Learning	19.8	20	0.0	0	16.0	20
V. Professional Content						
1. Repertory Content	1.0	1	0.0	1	0.8	1
2. Pedagogical Content	2.0	2	0.0	0	1.60	2
VI. Student teacher-Supervisor Interpersonal Relationships	17.8	18	87.5	21	31.2	39
Total	100.0	101	100.0	24	100.0	125

their supervision experience having to do with aims and objectives, curriculum, or professional content at a level of frequency which might be expected in the internship phase of a professional, integrated, training program. It is also apparent that the supervision experience, as perceived by the student teachers, centered on classroom management, basic elements of teaching-learning strategies and interpersonal relationships with the supervisors, at a level of frequency beyond expectations for this stage in professional training. The impression that emerges from a close examination of both the content of the incidents and the Tables is that in both the distributed and the extended practicum very little of the substantive content of their professional training prior to the internship was considered noteworthy by either the student teachers or their supervisors in the field experiences phase of their training. It appeared that supervisor's were content to provide "craft-rules", i.e., methodological direction based on trained intuition. This may point to difficulties in linking university coursework to the practicum experience. Presumably, if university classroom work focuses on problems of practice in the education profession, these problems should be highlighted during internship or actual practice in the classroom, particularly over an extended internship period. The Tables show that this is not the case, and so one is left to

speculate about the reason for the mismatch between what happens in the university classroom and the actual school classroom and, more particularly, why the supervision experience seems to appear not to move the level of professional performance much beyond the most basic apprenticeship level.

In an attempt to account for the state-of-affairs represented in the Tables, the questionnaire data collected were carefully examined for possible antecedents. No clear relationships could be established although one factor seems to stand out as suggestive. Generally, both elementary and secondary school student teachers, failed to recognize a strong training role for their supervisors. Supervisors were seen as resource persons, evaluators, liaison persons and sources of support, but not as persons whose responsibility it was to ensure that classroom practice was carried out at a high professional level. None of the elementary student teachers and only one secondary student teacher mentioned either the sponsor teacher's or the faculty supervisor's providing criticism of the student teachers' teaching performances. The expectations of the student teachers did not seem to include supervisors' integrating the learnings acquired in the university classroom with classroom practice. It may be precisely at this point that improvement in supervision is needed: the clarification of the supervisor's role in the overall professional training program in bringing classroom practice and professional knowledge together culminating in a high level of professional

classroom practice (Griffin, 1982). It is interesting to speculate on how this could be accomplished. To begin with, it is recognized that many learnings about teaching which are acquired in the university classroom are tacit and not subject to explicit recall on demand by the student teacher. The task of the supervisor, in part, is to illuminate these learnings through focused discussion, in order that they become more deliberately functional in the classroom for, although tacit learnings can be functional without this unveiling, if the supervisor ensures that they are tested in the classroom, the student teacher is encouraged to become more reflective about his or her teaching. The supervisor's task is to transform research-based knowledge of effective teaching into a form suitable for interpretive use; that is, to link research findings to the substantive problems of classroom teaching. Through a deliberate effort to concretize abstractions from theory through the technology of lab-like exercises designed to test such ideas in the classroom, a powerful addition to the repertoire of "craft-rules" usually acquired through practice and supervision, could be added. Instead, the evidence of the present study seems to point to a preconception and enactment of student teaching supervision which appears not to recognize the intellectual maneuverability that knowledge used interpretively can provide for the student teacher.

Comparing the percentages of incidents in the six categories reported by the subjects of the distributed practicum study with those reported by the subjects involved in an extended practicum (see Figure 1), only one significant difference is apparent.

[Include Figure 1 here]

Student-teachers in the extended practicum do report significantly fewer critical incidents in the organization-management category; however, this category still draws 39% of the reported critical incidents in the supervision of student teaching. This may be so because control is such an integral part of the student-teacher's "teacher identity" (Tardif, 1985) or, as Staab (1984) suggests, student teachers are insecure with respect to classroom management. They rate themselves lower on this aspect of their performances than on personal qualities, preparation for instruction or the use of teaching skills. Applegate and Lasley (1985), in a factor analytic analysis of the problems facing early field experience elementary student teachers, also identify management as a major concern--the first of seven factors. Further

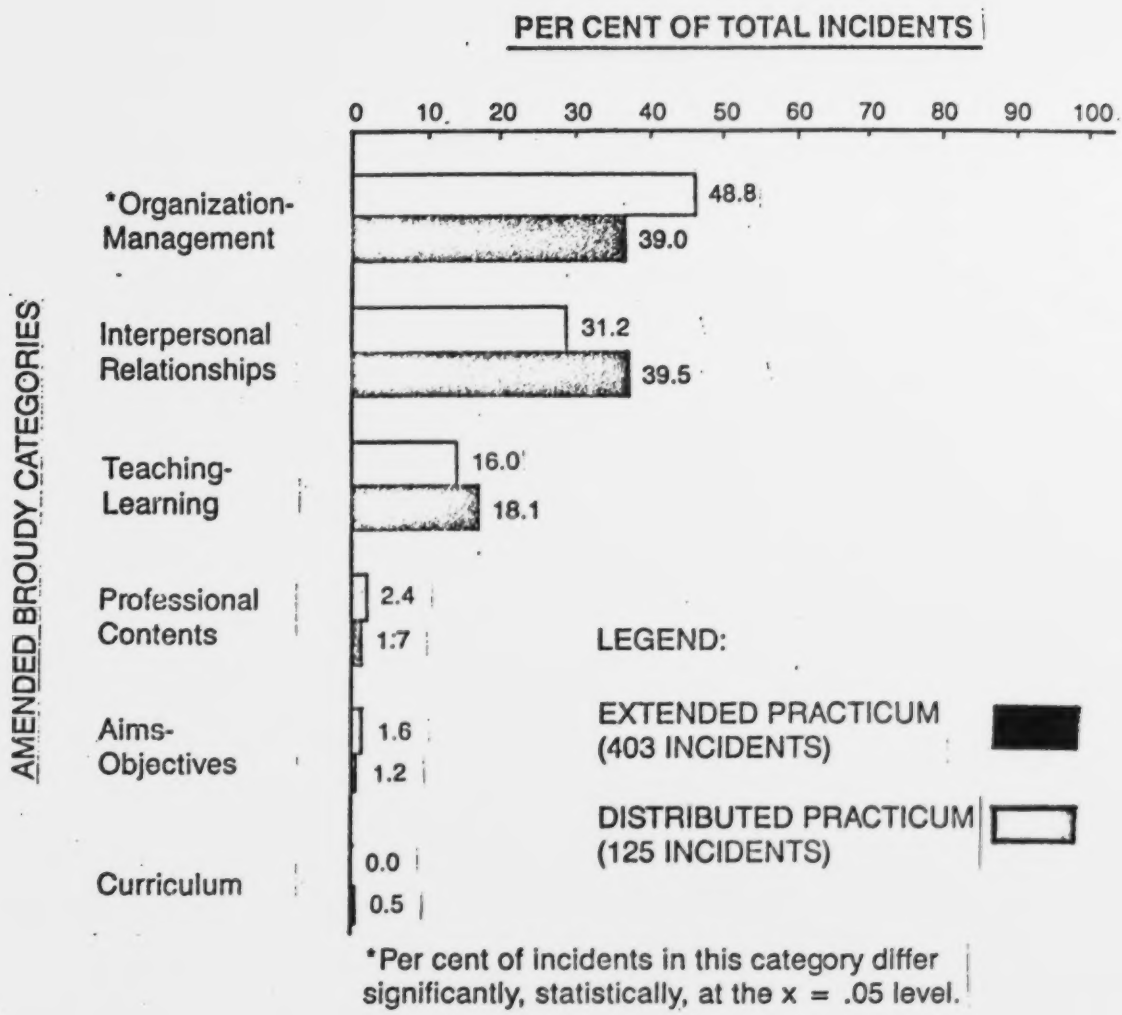

Figure 1. Comparison of the Extended Practicum and Distributed Practicum Distributions of Critical Incidents over the Amended Broudy Categories.

afield, class management was identified as one of the three most pressing areas of professional competence to be studied in the British Teacher Education Project begun in 1976. Wragg (1985, p. 202) asserts that, "Inability to control a class is the single most common reason for failure of new teachers and it is frequently cited as a major worry by student-teachers."

The findings of both this study and its earlier counterpart (Housego and Boldt, 1985); highlight the need to sensitize supervisors of student teaching, both sponsor teachers and faculty supervisors, to the importance of all of the problems of practice which comprise the education profession in order that they be given regular attention in the supervision process. To that end, a selection of the incidents collected in these studies has been used to prepare a workshop experience designed to do this and also to provide supervisors with the opportunity to experience something of the student teacher's perspective on the experience of having his or her teaching supervised, perhaps a means of reducing the incidence of interpersonal problems in the supervisory relationship. Indeed it may be that sensitivity to student teachers' perceptions of their supervision experiences could be an important component of a preparatory program for sponsor teachers, the sort or program which might produce the desirable results described by Copeland (1977) who found that student teachers who were placed in the classes of sponsor teachers who were prepared

for their role were more likely to take the risks required to test and acquire laboratory-learned teaching skills, regardless of whether or not the sponsor teachers demonstrated the skills. Student teachers who saw the skills demonstrated by unprepared sponsor teachers were less likely to acquire the skills, while those who had sponsors who were neither prepared or likely to demonstrate the skills, of course, had little chance of acquiring such skills.

Appendix A

Code Number ____

Response Sheet

Critical Incidents in the Supervision
of Student Teaching in an Extended Practicum

Date recorded: _____

1. What led up to this incident? (the context of this incident)

2. Which supervisor was involved?

☐ faculty supervisor ☐ sponsor teacher

3. What behavior(s) on the part of your sponsor teacher or your faculty supervisor do you think led to improvement in your teaching or, on the other hand, delayed or impeded your progress? (the incident itself)

4. Classify the above incident by checking ONE of the boxes

☐ positive incident ☐ negative incident

Appendix B

Code Number _____

Critical Incidents in the Supervision of Student Teaching in an Extended Practicum

INFORMATION ABOUT YOURSELF

1. Name (surname first) _____

2. Age _____ years

3. How did you hear about the internship program?

_____

_____

4. What led you to enrol in it? (Check one or more.)

- ☐ its reputation as a program
- ☐ the stipend
- ☐ the length of the school experience
- ☐ other (specify) _____

_____

5. In how many practica have you previously been involved? _____

6. Of what duration have they been?

1st practicum? _____ weeks
2nd practicum? _____ weeks
3rd practicum? _____ weeks
( ) practicum? _____ weeks
( ) practicum? _____ weeks

7. How do you feel about student-teaching as you move towards the internship experience? [Check one response in (a) and one in (b)]

(a)
- ☐ very confident
- ☐ somewhat confident
- ☐ not sure
- ☐ somewhat anxious
- ☐ very anxious

(b)
- ☐ adequately prepared
- ☐ inadequately prepared

.../2

8. How do you perceive the role of your SPONSOR TEACHER in relation to your teaching activities?

9. What do you forsee as being the role of your FACULTY SUPERVISOR in relation to your teaching activities?

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